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AUTHOR Brown, Dave F.
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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that sought to determine teachers' and principals' perceptions concerning state-mandated testing are presented in this paper. Data were gathered through interviews with 30 fifth- and sixth-grade teachers and 12 principals in 3 states--Tennessee, Illinois, and New York--where statewide testing has been implemented for 30 years, 5 years, and 1 year, respectively. Findings indicated that teachers and principals mistrusted the State Departments of Education and state legislators; were confused about the purposes of state testing; perceived themselves as powerlessness to influence state testing policy; questioned the effectiveness of the tests in evaluating achievement; believed that test results were used to compare school systems; and expressed concern that scores were overemphasized. Educators did not view testing as an accurate measure of accountability. Because of this alarming communication gap between state educational policymakers and local educators, state-level policymakers should include the input of local educators who are acutely aware of their students' learning needs. Legislators' main focus should be the impact of testing on students, as they are the real constituents of state educational legislative reform. (Contains 51 references.) (LMI)

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The Political Influence of State Testing Reform Through the Eyes of Principals and Teachers

Dave F. Brown

Department of Childhood Studies and Reading

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

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Introduction

Politics and education have not always been so closely aligned but have recently collided resulting in a multitude of concerns. Many of the educational reforms implemented during 1980s were initiated by state legislative bodies in an effort to hold schools accountable. One of the most common reform practices has been the adoption of mandated testing by states. A process that had begun in the 1980s, mandated testing for school systems reached its limit by 1990 when all fifty states had legislatively adopted testing for students. The 1990s have neither seen a decline in politicians' efforts to affect educational practice nor have educational demands been confined to the state level of governance. The seven national goals for American education were developed by the state's governors and former President Bush. Bush advocated national exams, and recently, President Clinton has indicated that a plan is forthcoming which will affect standards and testing of American school children (Shavelson, Baxter, & Pine, 1992). Federal funding for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has continued indicating the support of legislators at the national level.

The results of state mandated tests are being used for a number of policy-oriented purposes: providing evidence of school effectiveness, evaluating teacher effectiveness, and accrediting school districts to name a few. Decisions such as these lead to a scenario described as high stakes testing in which local educators can ill afford to ignore testing issues because they may be directly affected by state actions as a result of their students' test scores.

Testing has become a political tool which has influenced the actions of many teachers and principals. Several research studies have indicated

alterations that teachers have initiated both in instructional strategies and curricular emphases as a result of high stakes testing situations. These decisions have traditionally been within the domain of local administrators, school boards, or teachers. Local control over these issues seems to have been altered by testing mandates.

A survey of 41 state departments of education indicated that the main thrust of mandated testing was curricular improvement (Simmons, 1979). As a result of this outside involvement, curricular policy setting is not in the hands of local educators, but instead controlled by state legislators and state department of education personnel who make decisions concerning testing policies. Taking the authority for curricular decisions away from local educators ". . . bespeaks a profound mistrust of teachers and administrators (p. 529)," according to Michael Apple (1990). The words, "deskilling of teachers" have been used by several opponents to describe the results of mandating testing on teachers as they are left with few, if any, decisions concerning curricula. As members of the higher educational community continue to discuss the dangers or advantages of such policies, teachers and local administrators are left with the task of dealing with the changes on a day-to-day basis. The potential for problems exists when legislators, state department of education personnel, and the public have little or no idea what thoughts teachers have concerning their plight as mandates take effect. Lipsky (1980) noted that teachers are the most important agents of instructional policies, however, they are minimally, if at all, involved in educational policy making. Smith and O'Day (1991) stated that there is "little purposeful communication"(p.237) between policy makers and local educators.

The intent of this study was to determine teachers' and principals' perceptions concerning state mandated testing. Although the researcher was not specifically searching for information concerning the political aspects of state mandated testing, many of the educators interviewed provided thoughts concerning political involvement in traditionally local educational matters. Communicating the concerns of local educators to political decision-making bodies may serve to improve assessment processes and insure that future educational mandates serve the needs of local educators and, more importantly, the children that are affected by such powerful decisions.

Literature Review

The research that currently exists provides data on many of the instructional and curricular reactions by teachers as a result of testing, but none of the studies reveal the thoughts of local educators concerning political involvement in traditionally local decisions such as testing, curricular direction, or instructional decisions. The history of political involvement in educational issues may provide the reader with an understanding of the current situation that exists for teachers and administrators. Among teachers' concerns presented are their views on the intent of state testing policies. Included also are the thoughts of both legislators and teachers concerning the value of testing. These thoughts are reflected in the literature that discusses the emphases placed on test scores and uses of test scores in instructional concerns.

History of Political Involvement in Educational Issues

Political involvement in educational issues has become intense in the past ten years; however, legislative involvement did begin before the 1980s. McNiel (1990) found that curricular decisions have lately become a matter of broad public concern (p. 520). Chester Finn, William Bennett, and E. D. Hirsch have provided the public with unrelenting thoughts concerning what should be taught to the children of American classrooms. McNiel stated that many issues in education that once seemed to belong to the profession have now been transferred to the political arena. She was speaking of testing and curricular issues which have been transferred through political actions to legislative bodies.

Changes in political involvement began as early as the 1950s, due to the launching of Sputnik by the Soviets, as academics and federal officials united in establishing funding from the National Science Foundation to initiate national curricular reforms. The National Defense Education Act was accorded the role of providing financial assistance for school testing programs (Haney, 1981).

McNiel reported that the civil rights movement in the 1960s gave community organizations, courts, and state and federal civil rights agencies a central role in educational policies. In 1965, the United States Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act under which the vast majority of funds were Title I funds which provided financial assistance to local education agencies for the education of children from low income families. This legislation required proper procedures for objective testing to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs in meeting the needs of the students (Haney). The Federal Department of Education also began to gather

test data during the 1960s with the establishment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Madaus, 1988). The effects of this political tampering, according to McNiel, however, were to increase political conflict over schooling and to increase criticism of schools' performance.

After a widely publicized decline in student test scores during the 1970s, complaints from business colleges and the military of the deficits in skills of high school graduates created a renewed emphasis on testing from the political arena. Between 1976-1980 several states began to implement minimal competency tests (MCTs). MCTs were initiated as a means of upgrading performance in basic skills (Simmons, 1979). By the late 1970s, achievement tests were used for the following purposes: to hold teachers, schools, and school systems accountable; to make decisions concerning individual students; to evaluate educational innovations, and to provide guidance to teachers in the classroom (Romberg, Zarinnia, & Williams, 1989).

Intensive changes in the amount of governmental involvement in educational issues transpired following the National Commission on Excellence's report in 1983 that concluded that MCTs were not effective in advancing the needs of all students. Their report (*A Nation At Risk*) indicated that MCTs merely stressed minimum levels of achievement. This document led to numerous educational reforms, particularly, the back-to-basics movement and resultant emphases on standardized norm-referenced testing as a tool to assess the effectiveness of schools (Madaus, 1985). Standardized tests, at this point, became an administrative and political mechanism used to improve instruction and achievement and were associated with much more of a high stakes situation (Airasian & Madaus, 1983).

Added interest was placed on test scores in 1984 when Secretary of Education Terrell Bell issued the wall chart of state comparisons of SAT and ACT test scores. It was a call-to-arms for state legislative bodies as political involvement in educational concerns intensified shortly thereafter. Airasian (1987) reported that state mandated testing programs developed as a response to the accountability movement eliminated most of the local school system discretion in the selection, administration, content, scoring, and interpretation of tests. Many of the advocates of testing were noneducators such as legislators, school board members, and parents. Stake, Bettridge, Metzer, and Switzer (1987) reported that public concern may have been the single most powerful force that supported state wide assessments.

Legislative Views on Testing

Some studies have indicated that legislators have placed considerable emphasis on test scores. Lambert (1981) surveyed legislators and found that approximately one-fourth felt that it was appropriate to use standardized test scores for program evaluation. It that same survey, one-third of the legislators indicated that it was *very important* to use standardized test scores for program evaluation. Lambert also reported that 70% of the surveyed legislators agreed that locally gathered test data would be acceptable for use in legislative decision making. Pearson and Dunning (1985) found that many state officers and legislators viewed assessment programs as tools for accomplishing their educational goals. As state tests became more important to legislative bodies, these policy makers began to realize that tests had the power to modify the behavior of administrators, teachers, and students (Corbett & Wilson, 1987). Numerous research studies have presented data that indicate that high stakes testing has had a considerable impact upon

teachers' instructional strategies and curricular decisions (Brown, 1992; Corbett & Wilson, 1987; Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985; Floden, Porter, Schmidt, Freeman, & Scheville, 1980; Green & Stager, 1985; Haladyna, Haas, & Nolen, 1990; Romberg et al., 1989; Rottenberg & Smith, 1990; Salmon-Cox, 1981).

Forty-two state legislative bodies have provided approval for their state to participate in a 1992 NAEP assessment that will include testing of reading and mathematics in grades four and of mathematics in grade eight. This is yet another indication of the importance attached to test score information to state legislative groups. It has been reported that legislators from many states have assumed that state assessments would have the effects of improving instruction, benefiting teachers, and improving learning for students (Jaeger, 1991). Jaeger reported that the North Carolina General Assembly assumed that in the absence of statewide tests, "teachers had insufficient ability to determine whether their students were learning and what their students were learning "(p. 241).

A few studies indicate that all state legislators are not in favor of state mandated testing policies. In the survey by Lambert (1981) one-third of the legislators indicated total disapproval of standardized tests, and one fourth believed that there is no value in the use of external evaluation projects to determine program effectiveness for legislative decision making. Adoption of state mandated tests, however, and subsequent publishing of test scores, as is done in many states, are indicators of the approval of testing by many policy decision makers.

With the prospect of President Clinton's proposal for national testing and the support from the majority of the public for these tests, the issue will

remain in the forefront of the political agenda for the 1990s. The problem lies in the misconceptions of the public and legislative bodies for the value of these tests to either teachers, administrators, or in promoting learning among students.

Educator Attitudes Concerning Tests

Over the past decade, research has indicated that teachers do not place as much emphasis on test scores or value in the testing process as do legislators or the general public. Stake (1991) reported that tests seldom identify student abilities that teachers had not realized earlier in the year. Additionally, there is little diagnostic information from external tests that helps teachers to alter instruction. A number of studies have found that standardized test scores are used very little by teachers (Beck & Stetz, 1979; Green & Stager, 1985; Griswold, 1988). Teachers reported in a study by Olejnik (1979) that they used the results only when they had problems with student learning and wanted some clues for the reasons. The insignificance of achievement test scores for teachers' assessment of students is due to teachers' beliefs that such tests are not valid evaluation techniques (Nolen et al., 1990; Rice & Higgins, 1982). Teachers have indicated a belief that the scores are redundant, and that they value their own judgments more than external test scores (Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1982). Research from other studies has proven this to be an accurate concern. Results from one study indicated that teacher judgments were as accurate in separating learning ability groups as standardized achievement tests (Gresham, 1987). Teachers believed that standardized test results fell short as major assessment tools because they measured aspects of teachers' cognitive goals for students, but failed to measure students' social goals (Salmon-Cox, 1981).

In a number of studies, teachers have responded that test scores are utilized in identifying students for special needs programs (e.g., gifted or remedial) (Goslin, 1967; Nolen, et al., 1990; Rottenberg & Smith, 1990; Salmon-Cox, 1981). Teachers have reported using test scores for planning instruction (Beck & Stetz, 1979; Dorr-Bremme, Herman, & Doherty, 1983; Green & Stager, 1985; Linn, 1983). Some teachers found the scores useful in communicating to parents their beliefs concerning student promotion or retention (Stake et al., 1987).

Confusion exists for some teachers many times due to their inability to understand either the purpose or intent of giving the tests. Perhaps that information is known solely to state department personnel, or possibly legislators who may better understand why tests are mandated. Romberg et al. (1989) found that 60% of teachers surveyed reported that their districts use tests for the following reasons: to set a standard, to stress the importance of what is being tested, or to deliberately affect the curriculum. According to Simmons' (1979) study, state department personnel have indicated that curricular improvement is a thrust of state testing mandates. Romberg et al. also found that 45% of teachers believed that tests are used to inform the public of student abilities. In another study, teachers reportedly viewed standardized tests as time consuming, not matching their instruction, failing to reflect true student characteristics, and not meeting the important instructional needs of identifying material to teach (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985).

Many teachers have reported their dissatisfaction with the reporting of the results (Romberg et al., 1989). Nolen et al. (1990) reported that 80% of the teachers surveyed believed that state mandated tests were not worth the time

or money spent. The absence of curricular, content, and instructional validity of external tests is another reason that teachers are dissatisfied with state tests. The link between instructional methods, curricular design, and content and the tests offered by the states is often not a close connection which creates frustration for educators. Airasian and Madaus (1983) describe some of the results of the frustration with this comment:

> There is a mistrust [by teachers] of state and federal bureaucracies and the strong desire to preserve local control over curriculum choices and objectives which creates conflict because of the desire of test publishers, policy makers, and lay persons to have tests used for assessing differences among students and schools. (p. 115)

This statement summarizes the challenge that state legislators and state department personnel face when decisions concerning assessment are mandated from the top down and devoid of educator input. The idea of *top down* decision making has characterized education policy making for the 1980s. From the seven national goals for education determined by the governors and the president to each state's development of mandated testing, many new policy decisions have failed to involve educators.

Although legislators have the improvement of learning in mind through their decisions, the opposite may actually be occurring--an iatrogenic situation in which students may be the most affected. Baker and Stites (1991) describe the danger of the testing reform in this statement:

> Such findings raise issues about the quality of the reforms themselves, the declining quality of social and economic environments for students, and, most obviously, of the sensitivity of the measures themselves to educational reform efforts. (p. 151)

The reform efforts of the 1980s have succeeded in producing one major effect in education--isolating local educators from the mainstream of decision making in the education of American children. Many believe that these alterations have not been beneficial. Darling-Hammond and Wise (1988) indicated their concern with the changes that had occurred in schools because of the reforms of the 1980s with the comment that schools were, ". . . too rigid, too passive, and too rote-oriented to produce learners who can think critically, synthesize and transform, experiment and create" (p. 9).

Although other educational gurus may disagree with the impact of the 1980s reforms and resultant increase in testing, it may be an opportune time for legislators to examine much of the research on testing and its impact to determine if the desired results are a part of the original goals of the testing program. Examining the views of teachers and other educators may reveal a view of legislative mandates that cannot be obtained through any other means.

Methods and Procedures

Theoretical Framework

The study was conducted using qualitative research methods for the purpose of providing an in-depth description of teachers' and principals' perceptions of state mandated testing. An *interpretist theory* (Erickson, 1986) was the guiding philosophy in initiating this study as evidenced in the design of the study. The researcher believed that the most appropriate method of understanding the actions that teachers initiate as a result of state mandated testing was to consider *insider perspectives* (Eisenhart & Howe, 1990).

Evidence of this theory in the design of the study evolved through the use of interviews to reconstruct teachers' and principals' views concerning state control of testing. Erickson stated, "The task of interpretive research is to discover the specific ways in which local and nonlocal forms of social organization and culture relate to the activities of specific persons in making choices. . ." (p. 129). As teachers' actions are influenced by state legislative decisions, they respond in ways that indicate their support of mandates.

The broad framework of *symbolic interactionism* as proposed by Blumer (1969) is inherent in the researcher's philosophy through the realization that social influences have created the conditions prompting this study. Blumer explained this theory based on these premises: humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them, the meanings of such things are derived from social interaction, and these meanings help people to interpret situations. This study examined the meanings that teachers have assigned to state mandated testing and the actions that teachers' initiated following their interpretation of the testing situation.

Procedures

A qualitative research methodology was employed in the study. Teachers and principals were interviewed to gain their insights on the effects of state mandated testing on their professional decisions. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding social phenomena from the actors' perspectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Eisenhart and Howe (1990) explained that first person accounts of events and actions are necessary to provide a basis for research inferences. based on these beliefs, an interview approach

was chosen to provide in-depth data concerning teachers' and principals' beliefs about state testing mandates.

A nonscheduled interview guide was developed to assess teachers' and principals' views of state testing's influence on their curricular and instructional actions. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) describe a *nonscheduled interview guide* as an instrument in which the same questions and probes are used for all respondents, but the order in which they are asked may be changed according to how respondents react. An advantage of a standardized interview form with the same probes for all respondents is its strength in enhancing content analysis and reliability.

An initial interview guide was developed based on previous studies concerning standardized testing that involved both surveys and interview schedules. Researcher concerns which guided the study were integrated into the interview schedule. Based on a pilot study of the instrument with several teachers and administrators, a few alterations were made in the final instrument. The interview schedule was based on the following questions which guided the research:

1) What relationships exist between state tests and teachers' curricular decisions and instructional practices?
2) What are teachers' perceptions of the relationships between current curricular content and the content of state tests?
3) What effects do state mandated tests have on teacher control of curricular content?
4) Do teachers and principals perceive state mandated tests as appropriate instruments for evaluating student abilities?

More specifically, a number of questions were asked which often prompted participants to respond to the political influence on their expectations:

1) Does the content of the state test reflect your priorities for instruction?
2) How effective have these state tests been in evaluating student achievement? *Probe:* Explain. How much do you rely on these tests in making decisions concerning students? Are these tests appropriate for assessing students in each of the subject areas that you teach? Why or why not?
3) How are the results of these tests used by this school? System? State? Are they used by any of these groups to alter how you teach or what you teach?
4) Are you satisfied with the amount of emphasis placed on state assessment scores? *Probe:* Explain.
5) If you were in a position to make decisions about testing, what would you recommend? *Probe:* (Any laws, policies) Why?

Although there are no specific questions concerning the political influence on testing decisions, respondents often provided information which alluded to their perceptions concerning political mandates in the educational realm of testing. The responses provided data that indicate the challenges that legislative bodies face when educational policies are initiated that directly affect the teaching process.

Data Analyses

Each interview session was conducted by the researcher and lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Forty-one of the forty-two respondents agreed to

be audio-taped. Responses for the interview that was not taped were hand written.

Taped interviews were transcribed and responses for each question were used to develop basic categories of analyses and to reduce the data into manageable divisions. The *constant comparative* method was used in analyzing the data. This method involves the activities of sorting, selecting, rearranging, and comparing the data in search of themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As core variables or themes surfaced through the reading of the transcriptions, they guided further analyses of the data. Findings were developed from the examination of core variables. *Core variables* have three characteristics: they reoccur frequently in the data, they link the data together, and they explain variations within the data (Hutchinson, 1988). Original variables discovered by the researcher were compared with variables developed independently by two other researchers who analyzed the data. This process of peer examination is used in qualitative research to verify themes and to provide internal reliability to the study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Subjects

Teachers and principals from three states--Illinois, Tennessee, and New York--were chosen to participate in the study. These states were chosen because of the variations which existed in the amount of time that state mandated testing has been in existence and to provide diversity of educational settings from which to collect data. New York has implemented some form of state testing for approximately 30 years, Illinois has been using state testing for five years, and Tennessee was in its first year of implementation at the time of the study.

Schools in each state varied in the composition of student enrollments from low to high socioeconomic status and also varied in the percentage of minority students. The communities from which the schools were chosen were a mixture of rural, suburban, and city systems. Teachers and principals from six elementary schools were interviewed in Tennessee from two school systems: both a city and a rural system. The participants from Illinois were selected from a suburban school system of four middle schools. Interviews in New York were conducted in four suburban elementary schools located in high socioeconomic communities.

Fifth and sixth grade teachers were chosen because of the high volume of external testing in each subject area that typically occurs at these grade levels. School systems were chosen as a result of prior contacts with the researcher. Superintendents from each school system were responsible for selecting schools to participate in the study. The principals from each building selected teachers to participate based on the following criteria: that the teachers had taught for five or more years, that they had tenured status, and that they taught areas of the curricula that were assessed by state tests. These characteristics were required due to the belief that respondents would be more willing to provide information on this controversial issue if the security of tenure had been obtained. Due to the design of state mandated tests, fifth grade teachers were interviewed in Tennessee and sixth grade teachers in Illinois and New York. Thirty teachers and twelve principals were interviewed for a total of 42 respondents.

Findings

The following themes that were related to the respondents' perceptions of the political involvement of legislators in state testing emerged from the analyses of the data:

1) Attitudes of mistrust of state legislators and state departments of education existed among the respondents.

2) Participants reported that they were not aware of the purposes for the establishment of mandated testing.

3) Principals' and teachers' perceptions reflected a sense of powerlessness in regard to affecting state mandated testing policies.

4) Educators believed that the results of the state tests were used primarily for comparing school systems.

5) Respondents reported that state tests were limited sources of information in evaluating student achievement.

6) Participants reported a belief that too much emphasis had been placed on state test scores.

As findings are described in more detail, sample statements from interviews will be provided to substantiate generalizations. In some instances, the number of participants who reported similar responses will be provided.

Qualitative studies attempt to examine and report specific actions within a specified time and place. Because a qualitative approach was used in this study, the opinions and perceptions of selected teachers and principals within limited geographic locations were examined. It may be difficult, as a

result, to generalize the perceptions of the respondents in this study to other populations. A random sampling of respondents was not instigated which prevents statistical inferences from being developed from the following data.

Mistrust of State Departments of Education and Legislators

Several comments and reactions to the interviews indicated that the participants viewed the testing issue as controversial. Some participants were initially reluctant about using the tape recorder, and three participants particularly were concerned that their comments would be reported to the state department of education. After careful explanation of the background of the researcher, all of the respondents except for one agreed to be recorded. As the interview progressed, participants were more willing to reveal their personal concerns about testing and how it affected them on a daily basis. Four respondents asked that the tape recorder be turned off for certain responses and several others lowered their voices when providing some comments. Comments that were strongly unfavorable to testing were commonly given after the interview had ended and the tape recorder was turned off. The respondents indicated that these thoughts may be risky to publicize because they presented differing viewpoints than that of local administrators.

Principals' reactions indicated that they had no fears about their thoughts concerning testing. Their responses characterized efforts by the state department as less than acceptable to the profession. A Tennessee principal had this to say about the tests:

> When something comes from the state department we never expect it to work the first time. There are always mistakes. They spent more time on some of the directions than they did on the actual testing. I fault the professionalism.

Another Tennessee principal added this note:

> Testing is something that evidently at the state level is easily done. That's how you make your mark on the schools in Tennessee. You come up with a brand new way of taking a test. Seems like when we get a new governor and have a commissioner who puts somebody in charge, they come up with a fantastic way of taking tests.

Responses of this type indicate some frustration with state level educational policies that are devoid of local educator input. None of the respondents, however, suggested that teachers or principals should be heavily involved in determining testing policy.

Some teachers provided interesting remarks regarding the manner in which legislators chose to become involved in the educational process. A New York teacher responded by saying,

> When our students don't do as well as they should in reading, everyone wonders what's wrong? When they see the scores, then everyone's in on it. . . . it [the scores] becomes a battle cry for the politicians.

An Illinois teacher had this to say concerning state involvement in educational matters:

> I never really looked at these tests. I consider them a bother, I really do. It seems to me that Illinois is just trying to prove that we are good. We have some low ranking as far as education per capita income or whatever it is. I mean is this their way of getting themselves a better rating nationwide? I don't think it's gonna work. I think it's really ridiculous.

Remarks such as these provided by respondents were indicative of inadequate communication processes between local educators and state education department personnel and/or state legislators. Educational decisions that affect day-to-day teaching activities have not typically been an area in which

state legislators have established policy. Testing, with its ability to affect instructional behavior, is a personal and professional issue of concern for teachers. Curricular and instructional planning are viewed by many educators as autonomous decisions that may be controlled by local administrators, but not by sources outside of their immediate professional setting. Legislative directives that have an impact on these types of decisions are not common to local educators .

Confusion Concerning Purposes of State Testing

Only a few of the teachers or principals were able to provide accurate information regarding state education departments' stated reasons for administering the tests. More than half of the respondents (22) commented that the tests were used for comparison purposes by the state through their releasing of the scores to the media. Nine of the respondents reported that they had no idea about how the tests were used by the state. An Illinois principal provided the following remark:

> I don't know how the tests are used! Who knows? Nobody knows! They never tell us. They publish it in the newspapers, okay?

An Illinois teacher added to the finding of educators' ignorance concerning testing by indicating that since the tests were required she merely gave them without feeling a need to question such policies. An Illinois principal indicated some knowledge of the reform movement and added this comment:

> These tests are obviously directly related to accountability. The governor and the state legislators decided that they weren't getting the bang for their buck from the schools. We get this 'Let's improve Illinois' thing and it became a nationwide thing that governors said, 'We're going to make our schools accountable.'

Notice the concern again that someone else is dictating educational policy for decisions that have traditionally been in the domain of local school boards, administrators, or teachers. It appears from these comments that local educators are ignorant of the reasons that legislators have for administering state assessments. The tests cannot be implemented without the assistance of state education departments, who are guilty of poor communication processes.

Perceptions of Powerlessness

It is not be clear exactly what role, if any, local educators should have in determining how educational mandates are to be implemented. Some respondents' remarks clearly indicated that they did not need a reason for implementing testing, however, that remark in itself indicates that their opinions concerning testing are mute. All respondents were not negative about the role of testing as indicated by this statement by an Illinois principal,

> As far as the tests go, we give them. We'll continue to give them. There's nothing we can do about that. And that's what I'm saying, mentally, I've resolved that for myself, and I don't get angry about it anymore. It's there, you know, and I try to present that to my staff. You move in, get the things out of the way, and get on with teaching.

This comment along with others added to a pervasive feeling among several participants that they were powerless to affect state testing issues. Neither teachers nor principals believed that they had any control over such issues. Among the suggestions, however, from respondents for changes in the testing program, only two mentioned that local educators should be more involved in testing decisions or policy setting.

Reported Effectiveness in Evaluating Achievement

State mandated tests are quite often similar if not actual adoptions of nationally marketed standardized tests. Within these three states, New York and Illinois were using assessments designed specifically for their students, whereas Tennessee was using a nationally normed California Test of Basic Skills achievement test along with a criterion referenced test (CRT) that utilized items associated with the state established curriculum. Based on these findings, it appeared that there would be considerable congruence between state tests and local curricular guides for each state. The curricular and content validity between state tests and local curricula has an impact on the value of the tests to teachers. Respondents generally believed that they were satisfied with the match between state reading and mathematics tests and their curricula in these areas. New York and Tennessee teachers were dissatisfied with the curricular validity of the social studies and science sections of the state tests. Their comments indicated that often the content on the assessments was not covered in daily lessons or specified in curriculum guides.

More than half (17) of the teachers indicated that the tests did reflect their priorities for content. When asked, however, how effective the tests were in evaluating students' achievement, 13 teachers indicated that the tests were not effective in evaluating students while 10 teachers reported that they were effective. The Illinois teachers were the most dissatisfied due to the fact that scores for individual students were not published or made available to them. One teacher summed up the frustration with this remark,

> They [the state tests] are not effective at all because we don't get any type of printout on individual students. We have no way of knowing how Johnny did. As far as giving us any information, or giving us any feedback on what kind of a job we did, they're useless.

A number of teachers (12) indicated that all students are not good test takers, believing therefore, that state assessment instruments would not be effective measures of these students' progress. Five teachers mentioned that students can "have a bad day" when they take tests, making the results a poor indicator of ability.

Of the teachers that reported some value in the results of the state tests, the following reply summarizes the use of the scores:

> They [the tests] give you some information. They do not give you a complete picture. There are too many factors that affect a test score. It is a very small part of a very large picture, and it can be used, to me, in that manner.

Ten of the 12 principals interviewed reported that the tests were only minimally, if at all, effective in evaluating students. Three of the New York principals mentioned an idea that a New York teacher had reported earlier--that the tests merely reaffirm student competencies that teachers have realized long before the tests are given or the results received.

If local educators find little or no value in either administering tests or utilizing the results, the expenditures for such an undertaking must be evaluated. Without knowledge of how, or even if, teachers use these tests in constructive ways, this type of an educational policy becomes as useless as the tests are to teachers.

Reported Use of Results by Educators

Respondents were asked how much emphasis was placed on the results of the tests in making decisions concerning students. Twenty-five of the 30 teachers reported that they never used the results or used them very little in making decisions concerning students. It is important to keep in

mind that the Illinois teachers did not receive individual scores for their students. With the results of the tests disseminated to local school systems the last week of the school year, it is not possible for teachers or administrators to use the individual scores to remediate their instruction or to offer additional assistance to students who may need it. A few teachers reported that offering the assessments in the beginning of the year would allow them to use the results to design actions that could improve student success.

Teachers and principals did offer several advantages of receiving test scores. Positive comments regarding the accuracy and use of scores were made by six principals. Two stated that the tests were an effective cross-check of scores received on other external examinations. Three provided remarks that the state assessments were as appropriate an instrument as is available at this time.

When participants provided their perceptions of how the results were used by the school, the school system, or the state, both teachers and principals displayed a considerable amount of confusion regarding the purposes of the tests. The majority of the teachers (18) believed that the results were used both by the school system and the state to publish for public knowledge. Ten teachers reported that they believed the scores were primarily used by the state to compare schools and systems.

Participants were asked if the tests were used by the school, the school system, or the state to alter what or how concepts are taught. The responses were evenly split with one half believing that the test results were used to alter or influence instruction. Upon probing for reasons for believing this, most responses indicated that local administrators encouraged teachers to use

the scores as an impetus to initiate changes in instructional strategies or curricular decisions. The principals' responses affirmed this as seven reported that the scores should be used to alter instruction.

The responses to this question indicate that these teachers' perceptions about how the scores are used are not in agreement with the stated purposes of the state departments of education. State legislators from these three states may have believed that the scores should be used for other purposes such as comparison of schools or to alter instruction. Data from this group could be beneficial to local educators' understanding of the testing mandates.

Emphasis on Scores

When respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the amount of emphasis placed on state test scores, 18 teachers provided a negative response to this question. These participants reported that there is too much emphasis on scores and that this action results in additional pressure on them to raise students' scores. A New York respondent replied,

> I think there's too much emphasis in general on test scores. I'd rather concentrate on what I consider learning, and learning can't be evaluated fully by test scores, or even partially.

Two teachers remarked that the scores did not measure or indicate effective gains that students may make during the school year. An Illinois participant added,

> As far as academics go, my children are average and below average. What's that going to look like on a test? Nobody else is going to be able to see the growth from the beginning to the end of the year.

The indications from these responses are that teachers believe that they are the most reliable source of information regarding their students' cognitive,

social, and emotional development--entities that a single test score cannot provide.

Nine teachers were satisfied with the amount of emphasis placed on results. One of the reasons that these respondents reported being satisfied with the emphasis was that they felt no pressure from external sources to insure high scores. The principals were evenly divided on satisfaction with the emphasis placed on scores. The *yes* responses were accompanied by comments such as "Everyone likes to be a winner," ". . . because we do so well," and "It provides a good outside audit." Those principals that reported that there was too much emphasis responded that the scores were misunderstood, and that testing consumed too much instructional time.

In describing the origin of emphases on test scores, many respondents indicated that people outside of the profession were more responsible for emphasizing scores. More specifically, their responses pointed toward the public--particularly parents--that had more of a need for the tests. The lack of specific responses to questions concerning the use of scores or the emphasis on scores indicated that state testing is somewhat mysteriously guided and an educational policy for which educators have no control.

The final question of the interview provided an opportunity for participants to make recommendations concerning state testing practices. Nine respondents suggested that testing be eliminated. This comment was supported with the perception that there are too many external tests that students have to take, state testing eliminates time from instruction of more important topics, and that there is inadequate feedback from the tests to improve teaching strategies. Eight participants reported that testing would be more appropriate and useful to teachers and students if it were initiated in a

pretest/posttest format to provide needed instructional direction for that school year. Four respondents indicated that they would like to see less emphasis placed on scores, and two of those four wanted to eliminate the comparing of school systems' scores. Only one respondent suggested that school systems should be allowed to develop their own methods of assessing students. Two others mentioned that teachers should have more input into state testing decisions and development.

Conclusion

Since the reform movement of the 1980s has occurred, legislative involvement in educational decisions has become commonplace. State mandated testing has the greatest impact on educational practice due to the means in which local educators choose to interpret these tests. Research indicates that teachers are altering instructional strategies and curricular content as a result of their perceived responsibility to students and possibly parents regarding higher scores. Whether the changes that have occurred in teachers' practices are beneficial to the learning process or the needs of students is questioned by many. State and federal legislators appear to have little concern or knowledge of the impact of their established testing policies.

The responses from these local educators provide critical information regarding how the initiation of state testing mandates is interpreted by and implemented by local educators. These responses point to a number of barriers that exist among local educators, state department personnel, and state legislators. Of critical concern is the finding that local educators do not place much faith or trust in the decisions that are mandated from above and

beyond local authority--specifically legislators without expertise in the field of education. The principle of educational mandates being determined that are devoid of educators' professional knowledge or consultation is without common sense. This "outside" decision making process is a principle that has been renounced by the more recent reform practices that promote greater teacher collaboration and leadership through such practices as site based management and shared leadership. Smith and O'Day (1991) stated that, ". . . the common vision and positive school climate can best be promoted by a system of shared decision-making and shared responsibility where the instructional staff, in particular, have an active voice in determining the conditions of work." (p. 236)

The communication gap created by legislative involvement in educational matters rivals that of any generation gap that has existed. Support for the idea of a communication problem abounds in the finding that local educators are unaware of the purposes of state testing. The Illinois State Department of Education has produced a video tape that can be viewed by school systems which explains state purposes of testing; however, none of the school systems involved in the study were aware of the tape. Much less awareness existed in understanding the goals of state legislators.

Although many may believe that mandated testing has the best interest of the students in mind, findings from many studies indicate that instruction has become rigid and meaningless to students as a result of the return to the basics which is so often the reaction by teachers to testing emphases. Results from NAEP have indicated the limitations on learning that typical, traditional testing methods have created.

Reactions from state legislators concerning the reported uselessness of state test results to teachers may be quite surprising. In a time of tight state educational budgets, one may want to examine the expenditures on state testing practices. Would any successful business continue to promote and fund a product that is considered useless by many of its clients?

It is specifically these findings that provide the importance of this study. Most might indicate that policy makers have a responsibility to represent the views of their constituents. As surveys indicate, the public does support testing as a means of accountability; however, opinions from educators are less favorable. Students are the real constituents of state educational legislative reform. The impact of testing on students should be the main focus of legislators. This information cannot be garnered by public opinion polls but, instead, by listening to the thoughts of teachers--professional educators who are in daily contact with students. I do not believe that it is appropriate for testing policies to reflect the views of business, the public, or state legislators in lieu of establishing policies that fail to meet the learning needs of students or prevent educators from considering those needs. It is important to ". . . work toward agreement on what students need to know and be able to do when they leave the system" (Smith and O'Day, 1991, p.247)--a principle that does not exist in most states. Pennsylvania recently attempted to gain legislative approval for a proposed list of learning outcomes. The proposal was defeated, in part, due to local hearings which provided an opportunity for educators and community members to respond to proposals and voice their opinions to legislators. This is not a common practice for state legislatures, although it may be a valuable tool for promoting open dialogue and understanding.

As these findings indicate, teachers' and principals' views have not been considered in state testing mandates. One of the most important issues in determining the impact of state reforms is considering the effect on teachers' practices (Blank & Schilder, 1991) . Data for this perspective have been available for some time. Researchers have a responsibility for presenting this information to state policy makers.

The challenge of each state legislative body is to create a vehicle for enhancing the communication process between themselves and local educators. That process may involve a series of local hearings that unite education committee legislators with teachers and administrators across the state. It involves initiating surveys and interviews that provide data which support the formulation of effective educational policies. It is time for future formulation of educational policy to include the thoughts of those closest to the teaching/learning process--local educators--who are acutely aware of their students' learning needs and the impacts that future policies may have on these needs.

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